

## **EL Civics Program Deliverable 1**

### **Needs Assessment**

All funded agencies must conduct local needs assessments to determine in detail the range of needs of the potential EL Civics Education population in the local community. These needs assessments focus on the learners and the communities in which the learners live and work. Agency staff can use the results from community and learner needs assessments to generalize needs across each of the components for which the agency is funded and to inform the development of priority civics objectives. It is not necessary to conduct a specific needs assessment for each component for which your agency has received funding. As one of the major purposes of the needs assessment is to guide the development of relevant priority civics education objectives, agencies should submit the analysis of their needs assessment findings and their proposed priority civics education objectives at the same time.

The major purposes of the needs assessments are to:

- ◆ identify unmet civics education needs in the agency's service delivery area
- ◆ provide information about the English language and literacy skill levels adult learners bring to the classroom
- ◆ guide the development of appropriate (level and context) priority civics education objectives
- ◆ guide the development of appropriate (level and context) instructional materials, community resources, skills assessments, instructional approaches, and professional development
- ◆ provide information on what adult learners want to know and need to know and be able to do in order to benefit from participation in civics education activities and sustained civic engagement
- ◆ inform the development of emergent curricula that are responsive to the needs of the adult learners in the communities they serve

Analysis of the needs assessment results will assist agencies in identifying:

- ◆ the percentages of the target population(s) enrolled in local agency programs compared with the community demographics
- ◆ areas of the local community that are not currently being served by the local program
- ◆ the agency's program offerings that reflect the needs of the local community, target populations in terms of literacy and basic skills needs, and identify where there may be gaps in the instructional services currently provided
- ◆ the students' community-specific civics information needs
- ◆ the need for collaborative arrangements with other agencies to provide EL Civics educational services to target populations

## **1. Conducting a local community needs assessment**

If your agency conducted a comprehensive community needs assessment and submitted that assessment or a summary of the results of that assessment with its funding application, it will not be necessary to conduct an additional community needs assessment unless the assessment contained insufficient information. If the agency has not recently conducted an assessment of local community needs, this task should be the first step in implementing the needs assessment process.

Based on analyses of the community need assessments, as well as previous learner needs assessments and the collection and analysis of additional information such as local demographics and economic and job market trends, team members identify and analyze the data, and use the data to inform the identification of priority civics objectives and the focus of curriculum development and instruction. Needs assessment is an ongoing process. Community and program demographics and economic trends change. The target population(s) and the class offerings to meet the needs of this population often shift dramatically from one year to the next. The needs of the learners enrolled in an agency's classes six months ago may be quite different from the needs of those seeking classes today. Decisions made based on an analysis of needs identified through assessments conducted with the previous year's students may require some revision based on the demographics of the students who enroll in September.

### **Steps in conducting a community needs assessment:**

1. Identify a team to review current needs assessment data and feedback
2. Identify needs assessment resources available in the local community, current projects (completed within the last year) that include accessible local service area data.
3. Review data from local needs assessment projects to identify appropriateness and usefulness of the data as well as gaps in the information provided.
4. Make decisions as to whether to use existing data, to design and implement new surveys, or to use a combination of both data sources.
5. If the decision is to develop new needs assessment instruments, team members need to
  - a) identify staff responsibilities and timelines
  - b) determine the mode and content of the assessment instrument(s) (what do you want to know and how and from whom will you get the information)
  - c) design and distribute the survey instrument
  - d) collect and analyze the data, and use the results to inform development of your civics objectives.

**The following resources can provide useful needs assessment information:**

- ◆ local social services, Head Start, the California Department of Education, health departments, and economic development department studies
- ◆ labor market surveys
- ◆ reports from local city and county government offices
- ◆ regional planning agency studies (census, demographic, population projection, and other data by census tract)
- ◆ NALS Synthetic Estimates of Literacy Proficiency (available on CASAS website)
- ◆ local school district surveys or survey results
- ◆ CBEDS reports
- ◆ summary reports from local area Workforce Investment Board or One-Stop surveys
- ◆ WASC Accreditation report
- ◆ current census data

## **2. Conducting an in-class needs assessment**

Learner needs assessment can be described as "a tool that specifically examines, from the perspective of the learner, what kinds of English, native language, and literacy skills the learner already has; the literacy contexts in which the learner lives and works; what the learner wants and needs to know to function in those contexts; what the learner expects to gain from the instructional program; and what might need to be done in the native language or with the aid of an interpreter." (Weddel and Van Duzer, 1997, page 1)

Effective and ongoing needs assessment is an integral part of an instructional approach rather than an isolated strategy. Ongoing needs assessments that are accessible to learners at all levels of English language and literacy can easily be developed and integrated into regular classroom instruction. Needs assessment should not be limited to the beginning of an instructional session or the first week of an individual's participation in a particular class. Instructors should adopt an ongoing approach to needs assessment to allow for new and emerging issues.

For in-class needs assessments, the teacher uses level appropriate tools to assist learners in: (1) identifying their long-term goals/reasons for studying English, (2) selecting topic units to be covered as a class, and (3) identifying and prioritizing language skill needs and focus.

To be effective, needs assessments used with learners and potential learners must be suitable for the language proficiency levels of those being assessed. The in-class student needs assessment information-gathering process can take a variety of forms and formats. At the lowest proficiency levels, picture identification formats and use of the native languages of the learners have proven to be effective. Using a simple open-ended statement for identifying learner needs can also be very effective. The statement should include what – (identified skill) – and why – (in order to/so that I can).

For example: I need to improve my – (**skill**) – in order to – (**do something**).

I need to improve my **speaking** so that I can **answer questions in the employment office.**

I need to read better so I can \_\_\_\_\_.

Some of the more typical kinds of learner needs assessments include the following:

❑ **Survey questionnaires**

Surveys can include a list of topics, skills or language and literacy uses and learners can be asked to rank them, select areas that are of importance, interest or need and identify areas that are of less importance or have already been mastered.

❑ **Picture interest inventories**

Picture inventories are especially useful with low-level learners and for those with minimal literacy in their own language. A selection of pictures showing activities and contexts in which English language and literacy demands are likely to be encountered are used as the basis for determining the areas of greatest interest and the motivation behind a student's presence in class.

❑ **Picture prompts**

Using clear and accessible pictures of adults in a variety of situations that require language or literacy interactions can be used as the basis for class or small group discussions. Students are asked to identify what the individuals in the pictures are doing and the kinds of things they will need to talk about and write about in that situation. Students are then asked if they ever need or want to be able to do these things themselves.

❑ **Learner interviews**

Conducting informal one-on-one or small group interviews with students, either in English or in their native language, is an excellent strategy for determining what students already know, their primary reason for enrollment, and the ways in which they need or want to use English language and literacy.

❑ **Focus groups**

A focus group may consist of learners, former learners, community members, service providers, or local business persons. The focus group leader uses a set of predetermined pertinent questions to interact with the participants in a discussion format.

❑ **Language logs or journals**

Periodically students can be asked to write about recent situations in which they needed to use oral English language or writing skills. For higher-level students this might be a regular focused journal writing activity in which students respond to a prompt.

❑ **Language use inventories**

Learners can be asked to keep lists of the ways they use language and literacy in a civics context. Classroom time can be assigned on a regular basis for updating the list.

### ❑ **Reading material review**

Instructors can use a wide variety of reading material as the basis for needs determination. Students are asked to identify reading matter that for them is of most interest, most difficult, most important, or most needed. The selection from which they choose might include a building directory, a newspaper, a letter from a child's school, a label from a toxic household substance or a parking citation.

The form presented on the next page provides an example of how a group assessment of needs within a fairly narrowly defined content area can be used as the basis for identification of individual goals. The whole group brainstorms a list, in this case of telephone related needs. Students then transfer the list onto a questionnaire format and complete it individually. The tally of results for the entire class can be used to inform overall instruction. Additionally, students assess themselves with regard to each task and choose the most important or the most troublesome task to work on as a short-term goal.

| <u>Using the telephone</u>        | It is easy for me. | It is O.K. for me. | It is difficult for me. | I can't do it. |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| Call about an emergency.          |                    |                    |                         |                |
| Get information about a job       |                    |                    |                         |                |
| Make a doctor's appointment       |                    |                    |                         |                |
| Order pizza, taxi, tickets        |                    |                    |                         |                |
| Get information about education   |                    |                    |                         |                |
| Talk to the bank about my balance |                    |                    |                         |                |
| Call child's school               |                    |                    |                         |                |
| Understand marketing calls        |                    |                    |                         |                |
| Leave messages with people        |                    |                    |                         |                |
| Leave messages on machines        |                    |                    |                         |                |
| Call the weather number           |                    |                    |                         |                |
| Get information                   |                    |                    |                         |                |

## **Using needs assessment results for program planning**

In one agency, a committee of interested students was recruited to work on the EL Civics project. This committee of approximately 18 students developed an ESL student interest survey, to find out what subjects ESL students thought were most important to them for future research. The student committee administered this survey to approximately 600 students, in day and night classes. The project students went into the classrooms and talked to the classes themselves. The survey identified 3 main topics: health, housing, and immigration. Housing was the first topic students studied. The committee interviewed three representatives of organizations that helped immigrants find housing and address housing issues, and then invited these representatives to a schoolwide assembly. Over 400 students attended the assembly. The committee compiled the results of the interviews, along with additional resource information, into an information packet, which they will distribute to the ESL teachers for classroom information this fall.

## **Reporting Needs Assessment Results**

Analyze your agency's community and student needs assessments, provide a summary of the findings, and indicate how your agency will use this information. Submit this information in narrative format to CDE using the Needs Assessment Approval Form. To facilitate approval of your proposed priority objectives, please submit both the Needs Assessment Approval Form and the Priority Objectives Approval Form at the same time.

Include the following information in your analysis:

- ◆ comparison of the target EL Civics population to local community demographics
- ◆ identification of any local community areas not currently being served by local programs
- ◆ identification of any gaps in the instructional services currently provided
- ◆ summary of collaborative arrangements with other agencies (as appropriate)
- ◆ identification of any additional data resources that your agency used to document community and/or student needs
- ◆ list of numbers and names of community agencies that your agency surveyed.
- ◆ summary of the findings from both the community and learner needs assessments and indicate how your agency will use this information for program planning.

This deliverable should be in a narrative format consisting of 1-2 pages. It is not necessary to submit the actual "needs assessment" documents.